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Authors: Barbara Perez Deppman, FACHE

Gina LaMantia

**The Motivation to Mentor**

*These vital relationships are more important than ever.*

This past year’s events have accentuated the need for professional connectivity regardless of geographic location. One related outcome has been the elevation of mentoring as a valid venue for professional connectivity and innovative conversation at all career stages. With physical location no longer a barrier, virtual connectivity has allowed many executives to enhance their professional networks and contribute to the growing global perspective of healthcare overall. It is no surprise that mentoring programs are on the rise across all industries, and healthcare is no exception.

**A Mentoring Refresher**

As our industry expands across a complex landscape focused on increasing technology, equitable access to care, revolutionary pharmaceutical enhancements, creative collaboration, and managing change efficiently and effectively, healthcare executives and leaders will need continuous support that encourages learning and growth at all stages of the professional path.

Many healthcare executives have participated in the mentoring process. They are well versed in the intricacies of serving as a mentor or being a mentee. It’s helpful, however, to remain up to date on this important professional development and career-enhancing mechanism.

Mentoring is a strategic tool designed to help people (mentees) develop their career paths more effectively. Mentoring is not the same as training, teaching or coaching, and a mentor doesn’t need to be a qualified trainer or an expert in the role the mentee carries out. Though coaching is generally a short-term engagement used to improve performance personally or professionally, mentoring is conducted long term for generally six months to one year. Often, one gains a lifelong relationship with a mentor or mentee.

When a mentee connects successfully to a mentor, the mentorship can open the ability to pursue opportunities, gain perspective, and challenge an individual to think in new and creative ways. The mentor-mentee relationship also creates a feedback loop that is essential to anyone’s career journey.

**Benefits of Mentoring**

Having a mentor and being a mentor are equally beneficial; both parties grow and learn in these relationships. Mentorship is probably the most underrated aspect of building a career foundation. The guidance one can potentially receive from a mentor is invaluable; a mentor’s ability to help a mentee navigate the unknown paths of professional growth and define and reach one’s goals more effectively is what makes them so important. As noted in an article in the Jan. 21, 2020, issue of *Harvard Business Review*, individuals with mentors perform better and advance more quickly in their careers, and they even have more work-life balance satisfaction.

Mentors gain as well. A seasoned careerist can learn from early- or mid-careerists, especially as it relates to technological advancements and exposure to innovative healthcare practices. Research published in an August 2013 issue of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* found that mentors experience increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance and career success. Despite these benefits, however, while 76% of working professionals believe mentors are important to professional growth, more than 54% are not engaged currently in a mentorship relationship, according to research conducted in 2018 by Olivet Nazarene University and featured in the Jan. 21, 2020, issue of *Harvard Business Review*.

We know that navigating today’s complex, changing business landscape requires a combination of soft and hard skills. Having a mentor provides an opportunity to glean an understanding of the best ways to accomplish this. There are valuable lessons to be learned by all, especially during uncertain times. Even a highly sought-after professional may come to a point where career progression stalls. A mentorship connection in this instance can help illuminate and break through the barriers.

Organizations also benefit when their employees and members engage in mentoring relationships. The guidance imparted by a mentor might allow the mentee to take on new career opportunities, seek additional training or pursue advancement as an ACHE Fellow, for example.

Mentoring might also improve an employee’s confidence and provide clarity with continuous learning objectives and goal setting. Mentoring programs can enable organizations to harness their organization’s talent more effectively and deepen employee engagement, retention and organizational contribution.

Mentorship also lends a voice to many who encounter issues commonly experienced by those from diverse backgrounds such as implicit bias, stereotypes and identity backlash. Having a wide variety of diverse voices around the table is extremely beneficial to running any business or project because it brings different solutions and perspectives that translate to direct success and, in turn, results in a positive cascading effect. Mentoring members of historically underrepresented groups remains a critical component of ACHE’s mentoring program and a key strategy to inspire diverse and inclusive healthcare leadership at all levels.

**What Makes a Good Mentor?**

Generally, a good mentor is someone who is motivated and energized, cares about developing others, is a good listener, and is willing to commit their time. An engaged mentee is one who dedicates the necessary time and energy to be mentored properly. A mentoring relationship is most effective when there is a good match between the mentor and mentee in areas such as backgrounds, skill sets and experience facing similar challenges or roles.

A mentor is also someone with knowledge and experience in the mentee’s desired industry who is willing to share this knowledge to help the mentee achieve his or her goals. A good mentor asks the right questions so the mentee can critically think about important decisions and produce his or her own answers. A mentor should be someone who has achieved a level of success that the mentee envisions and someone who can challenge and push the mentee in ways other people can’t. The mentor is a continuous source of encouragement and support.

**Mentoring’s Basic Building Blocks**

A strong mentorship is built on trust, is discreet and respects confidentiality. A mentee should feel safe and comfortable sharing with a mentor in frank, transparent conversations. The best mentors don’t hesitate to highlight weaknesses and provide critiques, in a constructive manner. In fact, great mentors spend considerably more time listening than they do speaking.

Goal setting is a particularly important aspect of mentorship. Mentees are best able to identify a suitable mentor when they are clear about what they are looking to accomplish through the mentorship. The accountability should lie with the mentee; however, a good mentor can help provide the mentee with a framework for goals and set career objectives, especially if the mentee is plagued by doubt and uncertainty.

Organizations stand much better chances of advancing and achieving positive business outcomes when they help build leaders at every level. At the organizational level, mentorship is a great pathway for enhancing employee skills, moving toward organizationwide diversity and making far-reaching impacts on employee development. At the individual level, mentorship is insightful and beneficial and can be a transformational learning and growth experience for both mentors and mentees.

**Editor’s note**: The ACHE Leadership Mentoring Network digital platform is an excellent resource to identify the best mentoring relationship aligned for specific development goals and objectives. Learn more at **ache.org/Mentoring**.

*Barbara Perez Deppman, FACHE, is principal, Deppman Strategic Alliances LLC (barbaradeppman@askdsa.com). Gina LaMantia is director, Career Resource Center, Executive Engagement Division, ACHE (glamantia@ache.org).*

**SIDEBAR**

**7 Habits of Highly Successful Mentors and Mentees**

1. Active listening.
2. Dedication to their success.
3. Dedication to others’ success.
4. Curiosity.
5. Engagement with their surroundings.
6. Willingness to step out of their comfort zones.
7. Responsible, respectful and ready (the three “R’s”).

**END SIDEBAR**

**Possible Callouts:**

-When a mentee connects successfully to a mentor, the mentorship can open the ability to pursue opportunities, gain perspective, and challenge an individual to think in new and creative ways.

-Mentoring programs can enable organizations to harness their organization’s talent more effectively and deepen employee engagement, retention and organizational contribution.